DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 372 443 CS 508 639

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TITLE Communicating Rules with a Grin.
PUB DATE 8 Apr 94
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association (Oklahoma City, OK, April 7-10, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; *College Instruction; Higher Education; *Humor; Speech Communication; *Teacher Expectations of Students; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Strategies

ABSTRACT

A speech communication professor informs his students of implicit classroom rules by using a humorous handout. Now and then, the professor elaborates on items in class using stories of classroom encounters that led to the handout's creation. Some of these "tongue-in-cheek" rules (there are 22 in all) are: (1) try to arrive at class a few minutes late each day so the class will be sure to notice; (2) classtime is a good opportunity for catching up on work in other courses; (3) only the things on the board or the overhead projector are important; (4) do not worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation in written assignments; (5) students who come to class are guaranteed at least a grade of "B"; (6) the professor needs help remembering what time it is, so begin packing up books five minutes before the period is over; (7) if you have a complaint or concern, do not discuss it with the professor--talk about it with classmates or unload on the professor in the course evaluation; and (8) do not keep the handout or the syllabus--deposit them in the trash on the way out. The reaction to the handout over the years has been positive. (RS)

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Communicating Rules With a Grin

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Presented at the 1994 meeting of the

Central States Communication Association

Oklahoma City, OK

April 8, 1994

CS508639

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It has been said that we usually learn rules by breaking them. Unfortunately, the breaking of implicit classroom rules can be a source of frustration and embarrassment. Most college instructors expect (or at least desire) certain behaviors from their students, but rarely are those expectations communicated explicitly. Thus, students may only learn of an instructor's "pet peeves" by violating them.

It occurred to me a few years ago that these encounters could be avoided by informing students of my "unspoken rules" before they broke them. I knew, however, that it would be important to communicate my expectations without sounding pedantic. I decided to try using humor; the result was a handout entitled, "How to Score Points with Dr. Proctor."

I was a bit concerned the first time I passed it out--would it be perceived the way I intended it? My fears were calmed as I heard chuckling (and even a few chortles) from the students. I was careful then and now to elaborate on each item, telling stories of classroom encounters that led to the handout's creation (each point has a history of its own). When read with the right tone of voice, the handout becomes a series of humorous hints rather than a strident list of do's and don'ts.

The reaction to the handout over the years has been quite positive. In addition, I am happy to report that students no longer ask, "Did I miss anything important?" (#13), nor do they request early exams to accommodate their vacations to Florida (#15). I discovered that by communicating rules with a grin, my students and I know what we can expect from each other.

HOW TO SCORE POINTS WITH DR. PROCTOR

Some Tongue-in-Cheek Tips for Impressing the Professor

1. Try to arrive at class a few minutes late each day--that way, the class (and Dr. Proctor) will be sure to notice you.

2. Be sporadic in your attendance. It's not a good idea to "wear out your welcome," and Dr. Proctor won't mind.

3. Classtime is a good opportunity for catching up on your work in other courses. It can also be well-spent reading the newspaper, talking with a friend, or taking a nap. Dr. Proctor loves to see students using their time efficiently.

4. Avoid coming to class prepared. Reading the text in advance, for instance, means you'll lose a sense of spontaneity. You wouldn't want to "spoil" Dr. Proctor's lecture, would you?

5. Dr. Proctor is really flexible about assignment due dates. If you turn in something late, don't worry--it actually helps him spread out his work load. Penalties? Never!

6. Only the things Dr. Proctor puts on the board or the overhead are important. Keep this in mind and you'll take fewer notes.

7. Don't participate in class unless Dr. Proctor calls on you. It's rude to ask questions and inappropriate to express your opinions. Remember--this is education, not a talk show.

8. When someone else asks a question in class, pay no attention. Dr. Proctor will be happy to answer the exact same question when you ask it a minute later.

9. Inasmuch as this is only a speech communication course, don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation in your written assignments--that stuff is just for English classes.

10. When you make spelling errors, inform Dr. Proctor it's because you don't have a computer with a spell-checker. He certainly wouldn't expect you to use a dictionary, for heaven's sake.

11. Remember, personality is more important than performance. If Dr. Proctor likes you, you're guaranteed a good grade.

12. Nobody, especially Dr. Proctor, still believes "C" means "average." Simply come to class and you're guaranteed <u>at least</u> a "B."

13. If you're going to be absent, don't notify Dr. Proctor in advance. Just show up a week later and ask, "Did I miss anything

important?" (one of his favorite questions). Being the nice guy that he is, he won't hold you responsible for anything you missed while you were absent.

14. Here are some other comments Dr. Proctor loves to hear:

If you miss a question on an exam: "It's a trick question"

If you do poorly on an assignment: "My Mom thought it was great"

If you won't be in class: "I need to study for another course"

15. Dr. Proctor will be delighted to hear you are planning a vacation while school is in session. Feel free to head for Florida while the rest of the class abides by the schedule.

16. Image is everything, so be sure to put your assignments in fancy folders. That way, Dr. Proctor won't notice your typos, white-out, and handwritten corrections (like all professors, he's easily fooled).

17. Don't bother Dr. Proctor with questions during his office hours; he has work to do. Instead, approach him one minute before class and ask him to look over the paper you've written.

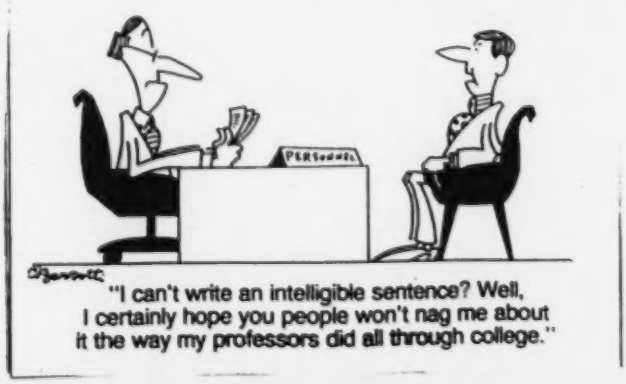
18. Dr. Proctor needs help remembering what time it is, so begin packing your books five minutes before the period is over. He will appreciate the reminder and be impressed with your concern.

19. Wait until you're at the crisis point before asking Dr. Proctor for help; otherwise, he won't consider your problem important.

20. If you have a complaint or concern, don't discuss it with Dr. Proctor--he won't listen or try to understand (after all, he doesn't really <u>believe</u> in this communication stuff). Instead, talk about it with as many classmates as possible. Better yet, give Dr. Proctor no clue that you're upset, then unload on him in your course evaluation. Now <u>that's</u> effective communication!

21. Don't drop by Dr. Proctor's office to chat--he's far too busy to be concerned about you. Remember, he's not in this profession because he loves working with students; he's in it for the money.

22. Don't keep this handout or a copy of the syllabus; Dr. Proctor didn't mean for you to take them seriously. He made them just to have something to talk about on the first day of class. Deposit them in the trash on your way out today.


"I can't write an intelligible sentence? Well,
I certainly hope you people won't nag me about
it the way my professors did all through college."